My relationship with Prigogine
You began to deal with complexity in the early 70s and, in a way, you are a prophet in the application of the complexity theory to the management. In those years, you met Ilya Prigogine who had not even been awarded with the Nobel prize yet. How did you meet Prigogine?

I gained an insight into Prigogine’s thought by reading the scientific section of the Züricher Zeitung, in which I found some very interesting articles about Prigogine, written by the cosmologist Eric Iantsch. When I read those articles, I called Prigogine, who was in Brussels at that time, and he invited me to attend a conference about physics at Villa Monastero, on the Como Lake. We started a discussion then: the way economy looked at the business world did not reflect the real nature of business. Personally, I believed that the theory of dissipative structures applied to the business world could be especially adopted in conjunction with the concept of information. Prigogine invited me to his place in Brussels to discuss the matter in depth. A few weeks later I was driving to Brussels when I heard on the radio that Prigogine had been awarded with the Nobel prize. He stood by his word and invited me to his place for a party with friends. I was supposed to be there at seven. Seven means seven o’clock to a businessman, so I was alone at the beginning. Prigogine lived in a beautiful, modern house, with wonderful Indian statues ... among which I recognized the famous statue of Dancing Shiva. After showing me the rooms, Prigogine asked me to introduce the guests, one by one, as a house-steward. I did so. At a certain point, a lady asked me: what are dissipative structures? I took her to the statue of Dancing Shiva and told her: “You see, this statue is a symbol of dance and dance has no other purpose than beauty”. In this way, the first message is to act without thinking of any result. Shiva, the dancer, is inserted in a circle of flames which stand for the persistence of things in a steadily changing environment: this is the second message. Prigogine turned this symbol into an equation.

Since then, we have met many other times but, despite me asking to further discuss the link between dissipative structures and information, we have not gone further into this matter. The topic was later dealt with by Maturana and Varela, who introduced the concept of autopoiesis, and finally by Gell Mann at the Santa Fe Institute, who introduced the CAS, i.e., the Complex Adaptive Systems. The CAS allowed to include systems of individuals and ecological cycles in the complexity theory. However, we owe to Prigogine the acceptance of complexity by modern science, which is an impressive achievement.

Strategy and complexity
The coffee market is notoriously unpredictable and very complex indeed. According to Kathleen Eisenhardt, a professor at Stanford, managers dealing with turbulent market segments adopt simple rules to keep up with the complexity of everyday actions. What do you think about this?

You refer to weak signals in your book. The only way to predict the direction of wind when you are sailing is to watch the sea color. Such a weak signal can tell you many things: not only does it reveal that the wind is blowing from here or there, it also warns you when the wind is strong, so strong that you’d better take down the sails. There is no common rule which helps you predict things in a logical way. You can